



UPDATE

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Los Alamos
P.O. Box 158, Los Alamos, NM 87544
<https://my.lwv.org/new-mexico/los-alamos>
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Calendar

July 23 Board Meeting, Unitarian Church, noon
August 8 Rodeo Parade

No Lunch with a Leader in July

Participate in the Online Community Survey

As CDD Director Isaacson mentioned in his talk to the League on June 18, the County's Comprehensive Plan is currently being revised. Residents are encouraged to voice their opinions in the survey, which will close on July 11.

Participate in the second Community Survey at PlanLosAlamos.org

Take Survey

Welcome, New Members!

Suzanne Lynne writes:

I am very happy to be a part of The League of Women Voters! My husband, Steve, and I have lived in Los Alamos for over 30 years. Before retiring I worked as a teacher, literacy coach, and principal for LAPS . I currently serve on the board for the Los Alamos Public Schools and the Bradbury Science Museum. I also volunteer for Many Mothers. It is a fantastic organization that is looking for more Los Alamos volunteers to help mothers who have newborns (shameless plug). In my free time I enjoy reading and doing jigsaw puzzles.

We are happy to welcome several other new members. We hope that they will write short introductions of themselves for another *Update*.

Steven Lynne

Vicki Baker

Anna Llobet

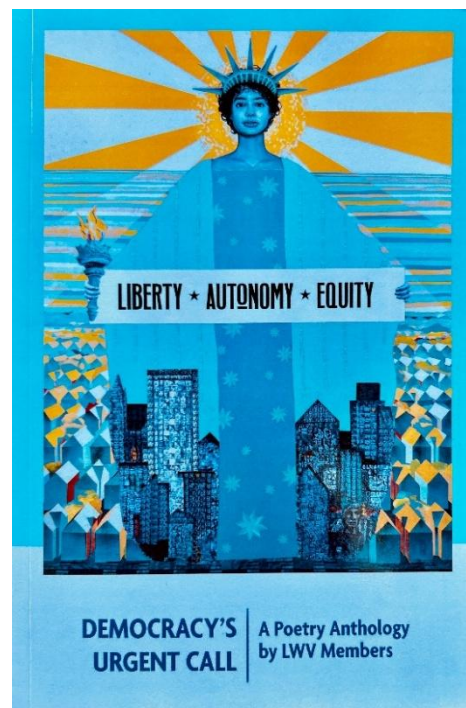
Gloria Galassi

LWVUS Celebrates the 250th with Members' Poetry

Last autumn some members of the League of Women Voters (LWV) in Wisconsin were inspired by the art of Niki Johnson's Pillars of Democracy¹ to produce a book of poems by League members nationwide. Their idea reached fruition with the publication of *Democracy's Urgent Call: A Poetry Anthology* by LWV Members.

The anthology celebrates the 250th anniversary of our nation at a time of unparalleled threats to our democracy. The back cover of the book reminds us: "It's a time to remember, reflect, and recommit — a time to hope, dream, and build — a time to show up, stand solid, and lead with voices that cannot be silenced. As poets, authors, and members of the League of Women Voters, we recognize the power of language to connect people, to stir hearts and minds, and to reaffirm the enduring promise of democracy." The poems in the book express the love for democracy while illuminating its fragility and strength at a time when we should not take it for granted.

Democracy's Urgent Call features poems by League members from Hawaii to New Jersey, including a poem by Dorothy Dickmann (Central NM League) and one by JJ Mortensen (Los Alamos League).



¹ Learn more about the *Pillars of Democracy* art at www.nikijohnson.com/writing/pillars-of-democracy. The artist was raised in New Mexico, and one of her pieces is featured on the cover of the anthology.

Copies are available for \$16 plus tax at Barnes & Noble, Target, Amazon, and other booksellers, or you may order a copy from our local League for \$15 with proceeds staying local to support LWVLA. To celebrate the 250th anniversary of the USA, order a copy by sending an email to [lwvla.jj\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:lwvla.jj(at)gmail.com) or sign up for a copy at the next Lunch with a Leader.

JJ Mortensen

March with the League in the Rodeo Parade!

The Los Alamos County Rodeo Parade will be held on August 8th. The League of Women Voters Los Alamos will continue the tradition of marching in the parade. The parade begins at the old Smith's parking lot and goes down Central to the library. We begin gathering at the parking lot around 9:30 a.m. with the parade beginning at 10 a.m. The League has traditionally been well-received with cheers and applause from the community.

If you plan to walk in the parade, please contact Ellen Mills: [efmillsnm\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:efmillsnm(at)gmail.com). Wear white if possible; Ellen will provide the suffragist sashes.

President's Message: 2026 National Convention

I am just back from the "Buckeye State"² where the LWV National Convention was held in downtown Columbus, Ohio. Four of us from New Mexico joined over 800 women and a few men who gathered in person for this biennial conference, where national progress is discussed and plans for a robust, democratic future are made. There was much discussion in the plenary sessions on how our democratic norms and laws have been attacked and the subsequent diminishing of women's autonomy in the last two years. Celina Stewart, the CEO of LWVUS, assured us that the League is down in the trenches, filing lawsuits where applicable, to fight the suppression of voter rights, the interference with mail-in ballots, the purging of voter rolls, and so on.

One key activity during the plenary session is to adopt a new League Program for the next two years. The delegates voted in favor of a new overarching Program called "Defending a Democracy Under Siege," which includes six prongs for programmatic focus: Voting Rights; Protecting Elections; Redistricting; Immigration; Individual Rights; and The



LWVNM President Hannah Burling and Leslie Wallstrom at the National Convention.

² What is a Buckeye? The Buckeye is the state tree of Ohio, which sheds a poisonous nut with a light-colored center, like an eye — but the Ohio favorite "buckeye" candy is a round chocolate with a peanut butter filling. Very delicious!

Presidency. This program also includes supporting the abolition of the electoral college and support for the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. There is much work to be done, and the League is well prepared – over 8,000 new members joined in the last year and funding is strong.

A Special Day of Action for community engagement has been declared by the League for August 8, 2026. How can we participate here in Los Alamos? This is the day of the Los Alamos Rodeo Parade, and we already plan to march and encourage all those eligible to vote. Please join us that day, if you can! (Talk to Ellen Mills or Leslie Wallstrom for more information.) The midterm election is November 3rd, and your League Board will discuss other activities we can pursue to encourage voting in November.

It was a privilege to attend this inspiring, educational National Convention and I learned a great deal about “best practices” the Los Alamos League can pursue.

Leslie Wallstrom

Making Citizens United Irrelevant

A new strategy from Tom Moore at the Center for American Progress reframes the problem created by the 2010 Supreme Court decision in Citizens United by asking a basic question: “What is a corporation?” Moore’s answer is decisive — corporations are legal creations, granted powers by states through statute. So, if those statutes clarify that corporations do not have the power to spend money on political influence, then Citizens United becomes irrelevant.

This state-level approach is already gaining momentum. Over a dozen states are investigating or adopting versions of the strategy. Montana is pursuing a ballot initiative and — critically — its state supreme court allowed the measure to proceed on the basis that it regulated corporate power rather than individual rights, reinforcing the legal foundation of the strategy. Hawaii passed a law restating corporate powers with near-unanimous legislative support.

New Mexico could follow suit by drafting similar statutory language for an upcoming legislative session. Well-crafted legislation could cover various types of businesses — corporations, LLCs, associations, and so on— and apply to firms formed either inside or outside of the state. Political action committees would still be able to spend on political campaigns, but funds would need to come from identifiable humans and be disclosed, a blow to “dark money.” Local NM groups have begun fact-finding; next steps include resolving legal questions, recruiting legislative champions, and mobilizing constituents to engage with lawmakers and to testify in committee.

Although legal challenges are anticipated, this approach is practical, actionable, and squarely responsive to public concern since most voters, regardless of party, believe there’s too much money in politics. By using states’ authority to define corporate powers, citizens can curb unlimited corporate political spending without waiting for a lengthy constitutional process. That possibility — restoring democratic influence to individual voters rather than anonymous corporate coffers — is both achievable and motivating.

DeAnna Kruse

DeAnna recently joined the League and wanted to inform us about recent activity in other states. The League’s position on Money in Politics is focused on action in Congress, but our LWVUS legislative liaison says that the League in New Mexico is free to pursue this way of fighting money in politics.

What Is the Canvass?

An exhilarating experience in New Mexico's safe, secure democratic process is to participate in the canvass. This is the post-election process to confirm that all the valid ballots cast are accurately counted and included in the final election results. Our Canvass Board is an independent, bipartisan body of five qualified electors appointed by the Secretary of State to resolve ballot marking errors, adjudicate voter intent, determine whether to count provisional ballots, and reconcile the number of ballots cast with the number of people who voted. The process allows election officials to verify that staff and poll workers followed procedures (e.g., confirming voter eligibility and documenting chain of custody) throughout early, absentee by mail, and Election Day voting. Spoiler alert: We did.

County Clerk Michael Redondo presented our Board with detailed election data including: a summary of ballots cast; the Bucket Report with vote totals for each candidate; and a breakdown of voting categories including absentee voting and total votes cast.

Absentee Ballots:

Approximately 500 absentee ballots were issued, with 324 returned. New Mexico requires absentee ballots to be received by 7:00 p.m. on election day. In Los Alamos, 41 absentee ballots were received after the deadline and therefore could not be counted. (The Board noted that the 41 late ballots would not have affected election outcomes because the margin in the closest race was 46 votes.)

Absentee Ballot Issues:

The Clerk reported that some DTS/Independent voters received incorrect absentee ballots. Affected voters were invited to appear in person to resolve the issue. Five voters contacted election officials seeking to correct or verify their ballot status.

Ballot Review and Hand Count:

The overseas ballots and absentee ballots that cannot be read by the scanner must be hand-tallied. The Board reviewed the procedures used for damaged and absentee ballots. When questions arise regarding absentee ballots, the Absentee Election Board tries to determine voter intent. This process is called adjudication.

Write-ins:

The 2026 NM primary Republican ballot had spaces for three write-in candidates: Senator, Auditor, and Treasurer. The Absentee Election Board reviews all the write-ins. With a substantially misspelled name, the review panel determines if they can understand the intent of the voter, and if so, they consider it a vote.

Acceptance of Canvass Report:

One copy of the certified report is distributed to the County Clerk; one copy to the Secretary of State.

Voter Registration Roll Maintenance:

The next scheduled voter roll cleanup will occur in March 2027 during the regular local-election cycle. State law establishes strict procedures governing voter removal from registration rolls, including the timing and conditions under which removals may occur.

Jody Benson

League Members Tabling at LARSO Health Fair and Chamberfest in June



Becky Shankland, Lisa Hampton, Karyl Ann Armbruster at the LARSO Health Fair. Photo by Leah Blackwell.



Karyl Ann Armbruster and Leslie Wallstrom at the Health Fair. Photo by Maire O'Neill.



Felicia Orth, Cynthia Biddlecomb, Leslie Wallstrom at Chamberfest. Photo by Anna Llobet.

Observer Corps Report — County Council – June 9

Wildlife Assessment Project, Proposed Increase to Gas Service Rates, Proposed County Charter Amendments

The session was attended by Councilors Randall Ryti (Chair), Theresa Cull, Melanee Hand, Suzie Havemann, Ryn Herrmann, Beverly Neal-Clinton, and David Reagor.

Wildlife Assessment Project

Council received a kickoff presentation on the Wildlife Assessment Project from representatives of Environmental Solutions and Innovations, Inc. The 12-month project is intended to address the county's high deer population and its impacts, including increased wildlife-vehicle collisions, property damage, and potential disease risks.

Wildlife biologist Amanda Rhyne explained that the project team will collect and consolidate existing wildlife data currently dispersed across multiple agencies. The study phase is expected to be completed by the end of September.

According to Rhyne, information compiled during the study phase will be used to identify and rank key issues based on factors such as public safety, feasibility, and community acceptance.

Rhyne said the final report will present a range of deer management options, evaluating each strategy's costs, effectiveness, and implementation challenges, such as actions requiring state agency or partner coordination.

Proposed Gas Service Rate Changes

With a 3–4 vote, Council chose not to approve increased gas service rates. Councilors Hand, Herrmann, Reagor, and Ryti voted against the new rates. Councilors Cull, Havemann, and Neal-Clinton voted in favor. The Board of Public Utilities (BPU) had recommended adoption of the proposed rates.

Financial Shortfall in Gas Fund

According to the County staff report, the proposed gas rate increases are driven by financial shortfalls in the Gas Fund.

The staff report states that "the ten-year forecast for the Gas Utility, presented as part of the FY2027 and FY2028 budget process, included a series of rate increases designed to generate the revenue necessary to sustain operations and rebuild cash reserves needed for future infrastructure investments." Those earlier revenue projections have proven overly optimistic, and actual results are falling short of expectations. The rate analysis used during budget development assumed FY2026 sales revenue of approximately \$8.4M. However, due to a warmer-than-expected winter and reduced customer usage, FY2026 sales revenue is now projected to be approximately \$5.9M, a decrease of about \$2.45M from the original estimate. Thus, the Gas Fund reported a net loss of nearly \$0.5M in FY2025. For FY2026, the net loss is projected to increase to about \$2.36M.

The staff report warns that, "without taking action, DPU would be forced to curtail maintenance and replacement activities, which would ultimately impact system reliability."

Proposed Rate Increases

Joann Gentry, Deputy Utility Manager/Finance and Administration, said that the proposed rate adjustments are intended to restore the Gas Fund to a sustainable level.

The proposed rate increases would have spanned two consecutive years:

- Residential, multifamily, and commercial customers: 29% in FY2027 and 17% in FY2028
- County and Schools customers: 30% in FY2027 and 19% in FY2028

Gentry presented a slide showing the effect of the increases on a typical residential gas bill. Averaged over a year, the estimates are based on using 70 therms/month at a cost of gas of \$0.42/therm. In this case, the average monthly bill would be about \$67 in FY2026, rising to \$79 in FY2027 and \$87 in FY2028. In winter

months, assuming 126 therms, the monthly residential bill would be about \$110 in FY2026, \$129 in FY2027, and \$143 in FY2028.

Council Discussion

Councilor Cull expressed concern that as customers reduce gas consumption—which is a key goal of the County's Climate Action Plan—many may feel penalized because fixed gas charges continue to increase even though their usage declines.

Public Utilities Director Philo Shelton replied that operating costs do not decline proportionally as gas consumption decreases because many regulatory requirements must be met regardless of system usage levels.

Councilors Cull and Neal-Clinton asked what the consequences would be if the rate increases were not approved.

Shelton replied that the Gas Fund would remain in deficit, DPU would have to cancel any capital improvements and, if that continued much longer, DPU could end up in violation with the Public Regulatory Commission for not completing required inspections. He said that typical penalties for noncompliance in the industry could be \$5,000/day.

Councilor Reagor was dissatisfied with the explanation about how the gas rate needed to be increased even though the cost of gas is going down. He said, "When gas was expensive, we had to raise rates and then, when gas is going down, we still have to raise rates. So, I'm thinking there's probably a better explanation of all of this, and we certainly should not approve it unless it's been explained more completely."

Councilor Ryti noted that he has had to vote on over nine utility increases since he has been on Council. He said, "I've been voting on rate increases more than once a year on average, so I don't think it's inappropriate for Council to be looking at this more."

What's Next?

After the proposed rate increase failed to receive approval, Deputy County Attorney Katie Thwaites explained that the Council could not independently propose a new rate.

Any revised rate proposal would first need to be recommended by the BPU.

Thwaites added that, at a future meeting, the Council could provide direction to the BPU regarding the gas rate and request that it consider a different proposal.

County Charter Amendments

Council voted 5–2 (Councilors Neal-Clinton and Reagor in opposition) to direct the County Manager to draft an ordinance to amend the County Charter so that no more than a simple majority of the voting members of the Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Public Utilities, or Personnel Board may be members of the same political party.

Party-Balance Requirements for Boards and Commissions

The County Charter currently reads that "No more than a simple majority of the voting members of any standing board or commission shall be members of the same political party." This restriction applies to all of the standing boards and commissions.

The proposed ordinance would keep the requirement only for those three boards and commissions whose decisions are not strictly advisory. All other boards and commissions would no longer have party-balance requirements.

Council Discussion

Councilors and public speakers were divided on the proposal.

Supporters argued that:

- Qualifications should be the primary consideration, not party affiliation.
- Some boards struggle to fill vacancies, and party-balance requirements can make recruitment harder.
- Most boards are advisory only, with final decisions made by the Council.
- There is little evidence that partisan politics significantly affects the work of most boards and commissions.

- Removing the requirement could broaden the pool of applicants and reduce vacancies.

Opponents argued that:

- Political affiliation can serve as a rough indicator of differing viewpoints and perspectives.
- Without safeguards, future Councils could appoint members who largely share the same political outlook.
- Diverse political representation can help prevent boards from becoming ideologically homogeneous.
- Boards and commissions often serve as a pipeline for future community leadership, so maintaining balance there may contribute to broader political diversity in local government.
- Charter provisions should help guard against potential abuses by future officeholders, not just address current circumstances.

Councilor Ryti said that he understood the merit in eliminating the requirement. He noted that Council had heard feedback from some boards that they do not find it particularly relevant, while others viewed it as a useful proxy for ensuring a broader range of perspectives. He concluded that, "I think what you want to have is people with different perspectives. And does having no more than a majority of a party help with that?" He supports recruiting people who represent lots of different perspectives, but said, "there's no way to enforce that in the charter or anywhere else."

What's Next?

A draft ordinance to amend the County Charter will be introduced at Council's meeting on 6/23/2026. In July, a public hearing on the proposed ordinance will provide an additional opportunity for public input and for Council discussion and deliberation. If the ordinance is adopted by the Council, then the proposed change will be presented to the voters for

adoption or rejection on the ballot for the 2026 General Election (November 3).

June Fabryka-Martin, Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report - County Council – June 23

*Housing Projects in Los Alamos County,
Foxtail Flats Solar and Storage Projects, LEDA
Agreements for Downtown Redevelopment
Projects*

The session was attended by Councilors Ryn Herrmann (Acting Chair), Theresa Cull, Melanee Hand, Suzie Havemann, Beverly Neal-Clinton, David Reagor, and Randall Ryti.

Housing Projects in Los Alamos County

Dan Osborn, Housing and Special Projects Manager, updated the Council on the County's housing production initiatives.

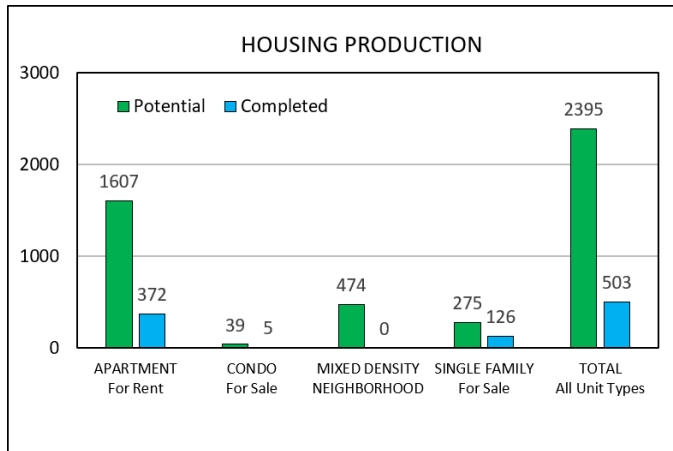
Overview of Housing Projects

Osborn cited projections from the 2024 Affordable Housing Plan indicating that by 2029 the County needs:

- 1,300 new units just to maintain the *status quo* and allow for limited growth, and
- 2,400 new units to satisfy market demand and achieve long-term affordability.

Osborn reported that housing projects comprising a total of nearly 2,400 residential units have gone through the entitlements process with the County and now have a by-right ability to build. This inventory of housing in the pipeline includes private as well as County-supported projects. Of this total, about 500 units have been brought to market.

The graph below shows potential (green) and completed (blue) residential units by type.



- Apartments for rent: 1600 units have been approved, with 372 brought to market, largely from The Hills, Canyon Walk, and The Bluffs.
- Condos for sale: This category is largely Arkansas Place. Forty-four units were originally approved, of which five are completed. The developer is finalizing new investment to move the project forward.
- Mixed-Use neighborhoods include North Mesa and Arbolada as potential projects.
- Single-Family for sale: 275 units have been approved, with 126 brought to market. Projects include Mirador, Arbolada, and Ponderosa Estates in Los Alamos, and Sherwood Rounds in White Rock.

Osborn acknowledged that the count of potential units includes projects that are not currently active, such as North Mesa, Ponderosa Estates and Cañada Bonita. The inventory did not take into account whether financing and infrastructure were in place, only whether the County had approved the project.

Housing Project Website

Osborn announced that the Economic Development Division is working with developers to implement a new housing webpage that will make housing project

information more transparent and easier for the public to follow.

Key features of the new housing webpage include interactive project listings where each housing development has its own clickable entry. Eventually, a dropdown menu will expand project details showing status, project type, number of units, unit types, and development phase.

The redesigned housing website will be rolled out over the next few weeks and months. A preliminary version of the housing webpage under construction is available here:

<https://www.losalamosnm.gov/Community/Housing/Housing-development>

Local and National Housing Trends

Osborn summarized national trends that are also affecting local housing production and sales.

- Market Outlook. Interest rates remain higher than many would like and have stayed elevated longer than anticipated, contributing to a persistent "lock-in" effect in the housing market. Many homeowners who secured historically low mortgage rates during the COVID-19 pandemic are choosing not to move or relocate because doing so would require giving up those favorable interest rates.
- Home Sales. While home sales have remained modest, buyers are beginning to adapt to the current market. People increasingly recognize that interest rates are likely to remain elevated for an extended period and are starting to move forward with their housing decisions rather than waiting for rates to decline.
- New Construction. As more buyers turn to new construction, developers continue to face challenges associated with higher financing costs, elevated material prices, and ongoing labor shortages.
- Local Market Strength. The housing market is gradually becoming more

favorable for buyers, evidenced by more seller concessions.

Despite these challenges, Osborn expressed confidence that Los Alamos County remains well-positioned for future investment and growth. He said the County's advantages include its rapid review timelines and a high-functioning Building Division, Department of Public Utilities, and Public Works Department, coupled to the County's progressive land-use plans, regulations, and policies.

Council Discussion and Questions

Councilor Cull asked about creating economic incentive programs to get vacant houses on the market. Osborn listed possible programs that the County could look into, such as providing funding to bring a vacant home into compliance or providing the owner with a list of property management companies that could help with home rentals.

Osborn added the caveat that any rental incentive program would need to be under the auspices of the Affordable Housing Plan.

Councilor Havemann estimated that the housing projects currently underway could increase the County's population by approximately 5,000 residents. She noted that the current and previous Councils had determined that that level of growth would be appropriate, provided feasibility studies, infrastructure improvements, and school capacity could support it. Havemann observed that accommodating this growth would help the community achieve broader goals, including downtown revitalization in both Los Alamos and White Rock, increased economic vibrancy, and attracting more young people to create a growing rather than declining community.

Councilor Reagor requested additional information about the proof-of-concept study for the RV park referenced on a presentation slide. Osborn explained that the County has engaged an on-call contractor to conduct a rough order-of-magnitude feasibility study for a potential extended-stay RV park on the narrow strip of County-owned land along NM 502, across from the airport. He noted that the property is currently zoned for industrial use

and that the study is intended to assess the site's feasibility before any further planning or development decisions are considered.

Foxtail Flats Solar and Storage Projects

Ben Olbrich, Deputy Utility Manager for Power Supply, updated Council on progress of the Foxtail Flats Solar and Storage projects under construction in San Juan County, New Mexico.

Olbrich reminded Council that the Foxtail Flats projects consist of a 170-megawatt (MW) solar generation facility paired with an 80-MW/320-megawatt-hour (MWh) battery energy storage system, which are being developed under a long-term power purchase agreement with Los Alamos County.

Olbrich announced that groundbreaking for both facilities began on May 14, 2026. He said that the developer anticipates achieving full commercial operations by June 2027.

LEDA Agreements for Downtown Redevelopment Projects

County Manager Anne Laurent introduced the topic of Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) agreements for two redevelopment projects in downtown Los Alamos and downtown White Rock.

1735 Central Avenue Redevelopment Project (former CB Fox Building)

Local developer Philip Gursky has proposed an \$18M redevelopment of the long-vacant former CB Fox Building at 1735 Central Avenue.

Gursky plans to transform this building into a mixed-use destination featuring a food hall, performance venue, private dining rooms, retail kiosks, a 20-unit boutique hotel, and a rooftop bar.

Gursky explained that the high cost of renovating this historic building requires charging market-rents for retail space. However, to support local businesses, the project design also includes a dozen smaller spaces and kiosks designed to be affordable

for local vendors selling New Mexico-made products, regional goods, and souvenirs.

Laurent said that the proposed Project Participation Agreement (PPA) between the County and Gursky includes a \$4M LEDA grant placed into escrow during construction and released to the developer only after a certificate of occupancy has been issued. This financing arrangement allows the County to retain equity in the improved building during the construction period.

She said that the County will also provide a \$2M interest-free loan to be repaid over years 4 through 10. This loan reduces the developer's financing costs compared to a conventional commercial loan.

Laurent and Gursky estimate that the redevelopment project will provide a return economic benefit for the County by generating about \$4.27M in local taxes over 10 years. The project will produce gross receipts taxes during the construction phase and subsequent retail operations as well as substantially increased property taxes. Lodgers' tax revenue will be generated from the boutique hotel. The business will also create 25 new full-time jobs.

The site plan will be presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission for review at its first meeting in July. Details of the LEDA PPA will be presented to the Council in the near future.

The Rock Redevelopment Project (former Time Out Pizza Building)

Laurent introduced a proposed \$1.2M project called The Rock Redevelopment Project (aka former Time Out Pizza Building) located at 116 and 118 State Route 4 in White Rock. VE Holdings, which is a partnership between local residents Janet Lovato and Timoteo Martinez, submitted a LEDA application for the project. This would renovate the existing building into a bar, frozen yogurt shop, and laundromat, and provide additional infrastructure to accommodate food trucks and new electric vehicle chargers.

According to the County staff report, the requested County fiscal participation from the

Economic Development fund is \$868K in the form of a 10-year, zero interest loan to be paid back starting in year 3 through year 10 of the participation agreement. The developer has stated their intent to apply for an additional \$400K of Metropolitan Redevelopment Area (MRA) funding for exterior building and site improvements and amenities.

The economic benefit of the redevelopment project is estimated to exceed \$1M of gross receipts tax on construction and food/beverage and sales over ten years of the participation agreement term. Additionally, the project is anticipated to generate 17 new full-time equivalent jobs.

A LEDA PPA has been drafted by County legal counsel. The public hearing for consideration of its approval is anticipated for July 28, 2026.

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report – County Council – June 30

Water Service Rates, Inclusivity Board, Traffic Cameras and Data Collection, Automated Speed Enforcement Services

The session was attended by Councilors Randall Ryti (Chair), Theresa Cull, Melanee Hand, Suzie Havemann, Ryn Herrmann, Beverly Neal-Clinton, and David Reagor.

Public Hearing on Water Service Rates

With a 6–1 vote (Councilor Reagor in opposition), Council approved an ordinance to increase water service rates.

Joann Gentry, Deputy Utility Manager for Finance and Administration, presented the

proposed ordinance and explained how the rate changes were derived.

Financial Shortfall in Water Fund

Gentry said the current cash flow from the Water Fund is not sustainable within the ten-year forecast period because water sales have been significantly less than projected. The proposed rate adjustments aim to sustain operations and build cash reserves for future infrastructure investments. Without taking action, DPU would be forced to curtail maintenance and replacement activities, which would ultimately impact system reliability.

Proposed Water Rate Increases

Water rate schedules consist of a monthly service charge plus a water consumption charge. Gentry described the rationale for the rates proposed for potable and non-potable water use and outlined how these rates vary according to the size of the water meter, season of use and, for potable water, volume of water use during peak season.

Gentry said the revised water rate schedule proposes two consecutive 8% adjustments for FY 27 and FY 28 for residential, multifamily, commercial, County, and school customers. Other changes to the water rate schedule include:

- a new monthly service charge for non-potable users,
- a separate schedule of monthly service charges for potable water delivered to dedicated irrigation meters for outdoor watering, snow-making, and irrigation,
- an additional energy charge of \$1.50 per 1,000 gallons of potable water sold to the Pajarito Mountain Service Area to account for pumping water 1,800 feet to the 250,000-gal. water storage tank on the mountain, and
- incorporation of debt service and contingency cash reserves into the rates for bulk water deliveries to LANL because of the number of capital loans the County has issued to build a new well and replace water production lines.

Council Discussion and Questions

Councilor Hand asked about non-potable water customers in the County. Public Utilities Manager Philo Shelton replied that the primary use of non-potable water is for irrigation of County parks. He said that the schools are not currently using non-potable water, but that the Middle School may do so in the next couple years to irrigate its fields. The experience is viewed as a proof-of-concept before considering expanding the practice to other schools.

Councilor Hand pointed out similarities between the proposed increases in gas and water rates. She noted that people are using less of these resources — as encouraged by the County — which makes it hard to justify rate increases to the community. Hand asked how other communities have handled this trend. Gentry noted that DPU routinely compares its water rates with neighboring communities. In general, the proposed rates are lower than those in Santa Fe and Santa Fe County, both of which have year-round tiered water rates; they are higher than those in Española, which has a 5% increase coming in July.

Shelton added that, in contrast to most other communities, Los Alamos is not growing very quickly and thus is not gaining new utility customers. He pointed out that "while everyone is conserving water, we still have the same number of homes to serve, the same miles of water line, and number of wells to maintain, and that's the challenge we have with our rates. We have aging infrastructure, and just to maintain a reliable system is more costly than inflation at this point in time."

Councilor Reagor challenged the fairness of charging higher residential rates for greater water use while large institutional users receive lower per-unit rates. Shelton responded that residential tiered rates are intended to promote water conservation, satisfy state conservation planning requirements, and recover the higher costs associated with meeting peak seasonal residential demand.

Councilor Havemann asked what the ramifications would be if the water rate

increase was not approved, preventing DPU from building up its cash reserves. Gentry explained that approving the rate increase would strengthen the utility's financial position, allowing it to meet lender requirements for debt coverage, secure low-cost financing and grants, and avoid delays to planned water infrastructure projects.

Public Hearing on Creation of an Inclusivity Board

Voting 7–0, Council approved an ordinance to create an Inclusivity Board. The ordinance will be effective in early August 2026. Deputy County Manager Linda Matteson said recruitment for the seven-member board would begin in July.

Traffic Cameras and Data Collection

Police Chief Dino Sgambellone presented information about the use of traffic cameras and License Plate Readers in Los Alamos County.

License Plate Reader (LPR) Program

LPRs are cameras that take pictures of license plates and vehicles in public areas. A photo of the vehicle, usually from a rear or side angle, allows the police officer to verify the accuracy of the license plate.

Chief Sgambellone explained that LPRs were introduced to the County in 2023 and are used solely for law enforcement. He said "it's estimated that over 75% of all crime involves a vehicle, so it's not surveillance for the sake of surveillance. This data helps us to accelerate investigations, find missing persons, and better protect the communities we serve by locating, identifying vehicles faster and more accurately."

Sgambellone emphasized that the camera technology operates under strict privacy and accountability safeguards. The Department's protocol includes strict access controls, audit logs, and compliance with state laws that limit data sharing and retention. The camera data is stored by the Axon service provider, but the Police Department owns and controls all data collected by the cameras, does not sell it, and

grants access to others only for justifiable legal reasons. Every system query is logged with the officer's identity, case number, reason, and timestamp.

Questions and Discussion

Councilors asked about data access, misuse prevention, federal data requests, vendor selection, and public records laws. Public comments raised concerns about privacy, transparency, potential misuse, the need for more community input, and quantified costs and benefits of the LPR program.

Councilor Havemann asked whether federal agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) could pressure the County to provide data collected by the camera system, raising concerns that it could be used to target individuals for deportation.

Chief Sgambellone responded that state law prohibits sharing the data with federal agencies in that manner. He said the County controls who has access to the data, and federal agencies do not have automatic access to the system. He added that the only circumstance in which the County might have to provide data would be in response to a valid search warrant, though he said he was not aware of that ever occurring.

Councilor Cull asked whether the camera data was subject to the Inspection of Public Records Act (IPRA). She gave the example of domestic issues, perhaps someone wanting to know if a particular person was in the area.

County Attorney Alvin Leaphart confirmed that, under the recently adopted state law, automatic LPR data is confidential and exempt from disclosure under IPRA. The law explicitly states that LPR information is not a public record, making it clear that the data cannot be released through an IPRA request.

Councilor Reagor expressed concern that the private vendor could someday sell the LPR data, either because of a change in company ownership or policy, or if the company were hacked.

Chief Sgambellone responded that the County's contract with Axon prohibits the

company from selling the data. He said the County owns the data, and any attempt by the company to sell it would violate the contract.

County Attorney Alvin Leaphart added that the contract remains legally binding even if Axon changes its policies or is acquired by another company. Any successor would still be required to honor the agreement. If the company attempted to sell the data in violation of the contract, the County would pursue legal action, including seeking an injunction and other remedies, to enforce its contractual rights.

Automated Speed Enforcement Services

Council approved authorizing a five-year, \$2.1 million contract with Modaxo Traffic Management USA to implement an automated speed enforcement program. The agreement calls for the installation of five speed cameras at fixed locations, all to be operational within six months. Councilors Reagor and Neal-Clinton opposed the contract, citing concerns about its cost and potential privacy implications.

Speed Camera Program

Police Chief Sgambellone said the speed camera program, authorized in 2025 following public hearings and Council approval, is intended to deter speeding and reduce traffic crashes. The cameras photograph only vehicles exceeding the established speed threshold, capturing the vehicle and its license plate. Citations are issued to the registered owner, who may pay the fine, submit an owner's affidavit, or contest the citation through an in-person, virtual, or paper hearing.

Sgambellone said all data collected by the system is owned and controlled by the County, accessible only to authorized personnel, and subject to audit under departmental and County policies. Camera locations are selected using traffic data, including crash history, traffic volume, pedestrian activity, school zones, citizen complaints, and traffic engineering analysis. He also noted that, under state law, revenue generated by the

program may only be used to support traffic safety initiatives.

Questions and Discussion

Councilor Hand asked how automated speed cameras differ from license plate readers (LPRs) and questioned whether they duplicate each other.

Chief Sgambellone explained that while both technologies capture images of license plates, they serve different purposes. Speed cameras use radar or similar technology to detect vehicles exceeding a set speed threshold and issue warnings or citations through an enforcement process that includes due process and hearing options. LPRs, by contrast, do not measure speed or issue citations. Instead, they collect license plate information into a searchable database used for investigative and public safety purposes.

During public comment, concerns were raised about the cost, privacy, and effectiveness of the cameras, particularly in addressing distracted driving. Members of the public also asked why the speed camera program had not been publicized.

Resident Chris Luchini argued that distracted driving — particularly drivers using their cell phones — is a greater cause of serious crashes than speeding. He questioned whether the speed cameras would photograph drivers and suggested enforcement should focus more on distracted driving.

Resident JJ Mortensen said she generally supported speed cameras but expressed concern that drivers can use GPS apps to identify camera locations, slowing down only near the cameras before speeding up again. She advocated for mobile cameras and asked whether the system would photograph drivers as well as license plates, noting that some reckless drivers obscure their license plates to avoid detection.

Chief Sgambellone agreed that distracted driving is a major contributor to crashes, but emphasized that speed significantly increases the severity of collisions. He said the purpose of the speed camera program is to reduce vehicle speeds and thereby lessen crash

severity. He acknowledged that some drivers may slow only when approaching known camera locations and said the department would like to use mobile cameras in the future, although current contractual limitations prevent that.

Councilor Ryti questioned the cost of the program. County Manager Anne Laurent answered that the cost is within the budgeted amount and, in addition, will generate revenue to subsidize costs. Sgambellone and Laurent also estimated the cost of traffic officers and compared it to the cost of the speed camera program.

Motion to Approve

Councilor Havemann moved to approve the \$2.13 million contract with Modaxo Traffic Management USA for automated speed enforcement services.

Havemann listed several reasons for supporting the motion:

- The public has long expressed significant concerns about speeding, pedestrian safety, and distracted driving, and the issue has been discussed extensively through work sessions, public hearings, budget meetings, and media coverage.
- The goal of the program is to encourage drivers to slow down and change unsafe driving behavior. Speed cameras are just one tool among many to improve road safety.
- The intent is not solely a reaction to past fatalities, but also to improve everyday safety and help people feel safer walking, driving, and commuting in the community.

Councilors Cull, Hand, and Herrmann expressed agreement with Councilor Havemann's comments and supported the motion to approve the contract.

Councilor Reagor opposed the motion, stating he could not support it because he did

not believe speed cameras would effectively address the underlying causes of traffic accidents. He argued that crashes involve multiple contributing factors beyond speed and described the program as expensive, suggesting the costs outweighed its benefits.

Councilor Neal-Clinton also opposed the motion. She acknowledged the intent of the program but expressed concern that, even if revenue was not the primary motivation, it still played a role in the speed camera system. She argued that the County should instead rely more on traditional law enforcement, such as increasing speed patrols. She described the program as a "double-edged sword" and said she could not support measures she felt might infringe on personal freedoms.

Councilor Ryti emphasized the need to follow up on any privacy issues that have been raised with data collection. He noted that privacy concerns arise in part because automated systems like LPRs collect large amounts of data, but data collected by speed cameras are much more limited because they only capture photos of vehicles that are speeding.

Ryti acknowledged concerns about people evading enforcement by obscuring or stealing license plates, but said traditional traffic enforcement (the Traffic Unit) cannot catch every violation, especially distracted driving. He referenced the widespread issue of drivers using cell phones and noted that Council had recently approved a hands-free driving ordinance.

Ryti summarized his perspective that improving road safety requires a combination of strategies, including designing roads that naturally reduce speeding, even if that is sometimes unpopular with the public. He supported the motion, but stressed the importance of improving public communication and ensuring continued follow-up on privacy issues and technology use.

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

Observer Corps Report – Planning and Zoning Commission – June 10 and June 24

The meeting scheduled for June 10 was canceled. The topics discussed by the Commission at its meeting on June 24 did not address any issues of concern to the League.

June Fabryka-Martin and Craig Martin

June Lunch with a Leader: Elias Isaacson



Community Development Department Director Elias Isaacson. Photo from losalamosnm.gov/Community

Elias Isaacson, Los Alamos's Community Development Director, has worked for the County since May 2025. He is an architect by training and is currently pursuing an Executive Certificate in Strategy and Innovation from the MIT Sloan School of Management. He serves on the boards of The Housing Trust in Santa Fe, which develops affordable housing projects, and the North Central New Mexico Economic Development District, which assists local governments in eight counties with community and economic development projects and initiatives.

Isaacson explained that the Community Development Department is responsible for six core functions: Planning, Building Safety, Code Compliance, Economic Development, Housing, and Tourism.

The Planning Division is responsible for overseeing how land is used, how it's developed, and how it's protected. Danyelle Valdez, the Planning Manager, is assisted by Senior Planner Desirae Lujan and Associate Planner Kristen Klem. Their responsibilities include:

- reviewing subdivision plats, site plans, and rezoning requests;
- leading long-range planning efforts including updates to the Comprehensive Plan (currently underway) and other land use policies;
- coordinating environmental and stormwater requirements with the Department of Public Works;
- administering Chapter 16 of the Los Alamos County Development Code, which sets land use, zoning, and design standards; and
- staffing the Planning and Zoning Commission and prepare cases for public hearings.

Following the state lead, the Building Safety Division adopts the International Building Code and the International Residential Code, which are revised every three years. The County may also adopt local amendments, for example to require that new buildings be EV-ready or all electric. The Building Safety Division reviews building permit applications for compliance with the adopted codes, conducts field inspections during construction, and issues certificates of occupancy when projects are complete.

Isaacson noted that currently there is no one working in the Code Compliance Department, but they are seeking to recruit someone. The role of the department is to respond to complaints about zoning violations, unpermitted structures, and property maintenance issues. They also coordinate enforcement of the recently adopted WUI (Wildland Urban Interface) code with the Fire Marshall. The goal is not punitive, but to create safe neighborhoods. He noted that Los Alamos County is considered a high fire risk area.

A major focus of the County Council is housing, Isaacson said. The County has engaged in a solicitation process to find housing partners, and as a result, several projects are under development. Coyote Mesa (Parcel A-8-A) on DP Rd. will provide 380 units, 240 of which will be deed-restricted forever. The purchase of deed restrictions is required to keep affordable housing affordable. Deed restrictions were also purchased for the Ninth Street Apartments. Another project underway is 20th Street, which will include 240 units south of Trinity Drive and enable the County to connect the Canyon Rim Trail to Ashley Pond.

Dan Osborn, the Manager for Housing and Special Projects, coordinates with the Housing Trust in Santa Fe to manage the County's home loan assistance and rehab assistance programs for eligible residents.

The Arbolada development on North Mesa is a private project that will include 114 single-family rentals and 23 units for sale.

The goals of the Economic Development Division are business attraction, business retention, and business extension. The department, with Maksim Khudiakov as the new Economic Development Administrator, partners with the Los Alamos Commerce and Development Corporation, the Regional Development Corporation, and the North Central NM Economic Development District. The County is using LEDA (Local Economic Development Act) funding and incentives to support projects with a local economic impact. One project is UbiQD, which has received a low-interest loan from the County to add a facility on Eastgate Rd.

Two other projects are being presented to the Council for approval: The first is redevelopment of the C.B. Fox building to include retail, restaurants, and a boutique hotel. The second is a multi-tenant mixed use "concept" for the old Time Out Pizza Building in White Rock that would include a laundromat, food trucks, frozen yogurt, and billiards.

Isaacson mentioned that it can be difficult to use LEDA for retail projects because the state law requires a lot of collateral. Additional land solicitations include proposals for 1000 Sombrillo and 35th and Trinity Drive.



*Elias Isaacson and Karyl Ann Armbruster at LWL.
Photo by Leslie Wallstrom.*

Ellyn Folten, the Tourism and Marketing Program Manager, is seeking to lengthen the time visitors spend here. Isaacson noted that Los Alamos will host part of a three-day Mountain Bike Race in September, part of the TransRockies Race Series.

Isaacson pointed out that, in response to the Strategic Leadership Plan, the County has created a dashboard to track progress in carrying out all of the action plans. To explore the dashboard, go to <https://www.losalamosnm.gov/Government/Performance-metrics>

Metrics are updated regularly by County staff.

Barbara Calef

An Insider's View of the Transportation Board (T-Board)

The T-Board is a seven-member board that hosts public meetings for the Public Works Department, approves the annual Snow and Ice Removal Plan, and advises Staff and Council in transportation and related issues. Our Staff Liaison is Public Works Department Director Eric Martinez.

Over the last year, the T-Board has endorsed the Pedestrian Master Plan, the Mid-Block Crossing Policy, and the Hwy-4 Crossing and Multi-Trail Improvements Project.

Terms are two years long. We meet on the first Monday of each month at 5:30 p.m. in Council Chambers, except for January and July.

I'm currently serving my second term on T-Board as Chair.

It is an excellent place to advocate for pedestrian, cyclist, and driver safety, as well as walkability in our community.

To get a feel for our meetings, you can watch the video recordings (recommended!) at <https://losalamos.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>.

David Hampton

Tickler Report – Upcoming Council Agenda Items

Tickler Report

Tentative Council Agenda Items, as of June 26, 2026

A partial list of tentative Council agenda items from the County tickler distributed on the above date. All items are subject to change.

- **Quarterly Intergovernmental and Regional Activities Update**
 - 07/07/2026 meeting. Update. No action requested.
- **Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) grant for the 1735 Central Avenue Redevelopment Project in Downtown Los Alamos (former CB Fox Building)**
 - 07/07/26 meeting. Introduction of Ordinance. Action requested.
- **LEDA grant for The Rock Redevelopment Project in Downtown White Rock (former Time Out Pizza Building)**
 - 07/07/26 meeting. Introduction of Ordinance. Action requested.
- **Stanley Pyram (Manager of DOE-Environmental Management, Los Alamos Office) and Brad Smith (President of N3B)**
 - 07/07/26 meeting. Presentation. No action requested.
- **Proposed Charter Amendment Pertaining to Standing Boards and Commissions and Ad Hoc Advisory Committees**
 - 07/07/2026 meeting. Public hearing. Action requested.
- **Robert Gibson, Chair of Board of Public Utilities**
 - 07/14/26 meeting. Presentation. No action requested.
- **Community Dashboard of Performance Metrics**
 - 07/14/2026 meeting. Presentation. No action requested.
- **Comprehensive Plan Update**
 - 07/14/26 meeting. Presentation. No action requested.
- **Electric Coordination Agreement (ECA)**
 - 07/14/2026 meeting. Presentation. No action requested.

eComment Tool for Council meetings:

You can submit online public comments for selected upcoming meetings at:
<https://losalamos.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>

Select List View and This Year. Locate the meeting and look for Comment” in the “eComment” column in the far-right, indicating that the meeting is open for public comment.

See details at:

<https://ladailypost.com/county-launches-ecomment-tool-for-council-meetings/>



Mail to: LWV Los Alamos / P.O. Box 158 / Los Alamos, NM 87544
(Each individual must complete a separate application.)

Name: _____ Partner*: _____

Address: _____ Date: _____

_____ ZIP: _____

Phone 1: _____
(cellular phone)

Phone 2: _____
(other phone)

E-mail (required): _____

Dues: The recommended dues amount is \$75, but members can pay any amount from \$20 up. **All checks for membership dues should be payable to LWVUS.** 20% of dues will go to LWVLA, 47% will go to LWVNM, and 33% will go to LWVUS. (Only the 20% for LWVLA is tax-deductible. A tax-deduction statement will be supplied on request.)

Newsletter: How do you want to receive the *Update* newsletter:

_____ email it as a PDF file _____ mail a hard copy _____ no newsletter

_____ Check here to receive occasional Friendly Reminders of upcoming events by e-mail.

Ways to help the League if you wish to be an active member (check as many as apply)

Advocate for League positions: communicate with local, state, and federal leaders.

_____ Serve on the LWV-Los Alamos Board

_____ Observer Corps: Watch Council, DPU, P&Z meetings etc. and write a summary to publish in our newsletter. (All meetings are recorded, so you can watch them later.)

_____ Fundraising – Assist in raising money for LWVLA.

_____ Voter Guide – Assist in developing the Guide – edit, develop questions, work with news publications, etc

_____ Lunch with a Leader – order/deliver lunches when we meet in person; help set up tables.

_____ Newsletter – Write newsletter articles on a local issue or League activity for the *Update*.

_____ Organize/provide refreshments for forums and other in-person meetings.

_____ Publicity – Submit press releases to local media.

_____ Voter registration – Register voters at events such as the Farmers Market (with training by the County Clerk's office).

_____ Website / Social Media – Provide technical assistance and develop content.

_____ Another area (please specify): _____

* Optional – another LWVLA member in the same household.

Rev. 11/5/25

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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